



Donna MacLearn/The Patriot Ledger

U.S. Coast Guard Capt. John Schempf, left, presents a public service commendation for helping to restore Bug Light to Earl McMahon, center, and Edward Heap, members of the Bug Light committee, at a ceremony Saturday in Duxbury.

Coast Guard honors group for fight to 'Save the Bug'

By Donna MacLearn
The Patriot Ledger

DUXBURY — The U.S. Coast Guard presented a public service award Saturday to the 20-person private organization responsible for saving historic Bug Light from destruction.

In reading the commendation, U.S. Coast Guard Capt. John Schempf said, "Through its action over the past year, Project Bug Light has provided valuable support to the aids-to-navigation mission of the Coast Guard. Its concern for the Duxbury Pier Lighthouse (Bug Light) is most highly commended and greatly appreciated by the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard."

Later during the award ceremony, which was held off Bay Road overlooking Duxbury Bay, he told the committee, "I wish I had a group like this for all 14 lighthouses." Boston's group commander oversees the 14 lighthouses from Seabrook, N.H., to Cape Cod.

During the past three years, Bug Light committee members from Plymouth, Kingston and Duxbury raised \$30,000 by selling "Save the Bug" T-shirts and more than 700 cup plates, raffling off a painting, promoting a fashion show and playing fund-raising baseball games.

They received \$2,500 from a Quincy charitable organization, \$900 from the first Duxbury Open-

Duxbury

ing Day on the Bay regatta and large and small donations from individuals.

"One fellow from Attleboro sent us a check for \$1,000 because he liked what we were doing," said Bug Light committee President Earl McMahon. "A Duxbury man gave us \$1,000 and said, 'If you need more, just call me.'"

Also, Bug Light committee members contributed "thousands of dollars more" by making repairs and scraping and painting the top half of the iron navigational aid themselves, McMahon said.

"Now, we don't owe 10 cents to anybody," he said. "Everything is paid off clear. We even have a balance of \$2,000."

Schempf said he was pleased with the committee's work, calling it "a major undertaking." The Coast Guard restored the bottom half of Bug Light three years ago.

"With the weather, the cost and the difficulty of getting material out there, I personally am well aware of what you have been up against," he said. To save money, the Coast Guard had planned to dismantle the top of the rusty lighthouse and replace it with a low-maintenance, light-topped fiberglass pole.

But area residents protested. Many of them said they or mem-

bers of their families had been guided to home port on moonless nights or foggy days by what they called the "friendly" 114-year-old light.

Also, they valued its link with the past. "I was born and brought up in this area," Bug Light committee Chairman Adam Sherman explained Saturday. "I saw no good reason for removing a historic landmark in the Plymouth area."

When Duxbury's Edward Heap heard about the Coast Guard's plans to topple "The Bug," he wrote a letter of concern to a local newspaper.

McMahon became involved. The committee formed after some area residents denounced the Coast Guard's modernization plans at a Plymouth meeting. Eventually, state Sen. Edward Kirby, R-Whitman, and U.S. Rep. Gerry Studds pressured the Coast Guard to cancel the original proposal, Heap said.

In exchange, the committee agreed to maintain the top half of Bug Light for five years. On Saturday, Schempf said the Coast Guard would be glad to extend the committee's maintenance lease beyond 1988 if members request it.

McMahon said the committee planned to propose installing solar panels to run the light's battery and will suggest restoring the thickness of some of the lighthouse's metal plates. He was quick to add, "We can do it ourselves."

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